"K"

He was a famous man who had lost himself through fear, but found courage in an inspiring woman's love

Mary Roberts Rinehart
tells the story

Sidney comes to know sorrow intimately, and Christine, the bride, is disillusioned about her man.

K. LeMoyne, a queer stranger with gentle manners, becomes a roomer at the Page home, presided over by Sidney, her invalid mother, Anna, and her old maid aunt, Harriet, a dressmaker. Sidney becomes a hospital nurse through the influence of Dr. Max Wilson, a brilliant young surgeon, smitten with her charm. K. loves her from a distance, and so does Joe Drummond, an old high-school chum. At the hospital, Sidney learns the world's sorrows. She becomes acquainted with Charlotta Harrison, who has been intimate with Wilson and is jealous of unoffending Sidney. Her chum, Christine Lorenz, marries Palmer Howe, a young society rake, and they take rooms at the Page home. Despite K.'s efforts to avoid strangers, Doctor Max meets him one night and finds he is a famous Doctor Edwardes, supposedly dead. Max keeps the secret at his old friend's urgent request.

CHAPTER XII.
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When Palmer and Christine returned from their wedding trip Anna Page made much of the arrival, insisted on dinner for them that night at the little house, must help Christine unpack her trunks and arrange her wedding gifts about the apartment. She was brighter than she had been for days, more interested. The wonders of the trousseau filled her with admiration and a sort of jealous envy for Sidney, who could have none of these things. In a pathetic sort of way she mothered Christine in lieu of her own daughter.

And it was her quick eye that discerned something wrong. Christine was not happy. Under her excitement was an undercurrent of reserve. Anna, rich in maternity if in nothing else, felt it, and in reply to some speech of Christine's that struck her as hard, not quite fitting, she gave her a gentle admonishing.

"Married life takes a little adjusting, my dear," she said. "After we have lived to ourselves for a number of years, it is not easy to live for someone else."

Christine straightened from the tea table she was arranging.

"That's true, of course. But why should the woman do all the adjusting?"

"Men are more set," said poor Anna, who had never been set in anything in her life. "It is harder for them to give in. And, of course, Palmer is older, and his habits—"

"The less said about Palmer's habits the better," flashed Christine. "I appear to have married a bunch of habits."

She gave over her unpacking, and sat down listlessly by the fire, while Anna moved about, busy with the small activities that delighted her.

Christine was not without courage. She was making a brave clutch at happiness. But that afternoon of the first day at home she was terrified. She was glad when Anna went and left her alone by her fire.

The day's exertion had been bad for Anna. Le Moyne found her on the couch in the transformed sewing room, and gave her a quick glance of apprehension. She was propped up high with pillows, with a bottle of aromatic ammonia beside her.

"Just—short of breath," she panted. "I—I must get down. Sidney—is coming home—to supper; and—the others—Palmer and—"

That was as far as she got. K., watch in hand, found her pulse thin, stringy, irregular. He had been prepared for some such emergency, and he hurried into his room for amyl nitrate. When he came back she was almost unconscious. There was no time even to call Katie. He broke the capsule in a towel, and held it over her face. After a time the spasm relaxed, but her condition remained alarming.

Harriet, who had come home by that time, sat by the couch and held her sister's hand. Only once in the next hour or so did she speak. They had sent for Doctor Ed, but he had not come yet. Harriet was too wretched to notice the professional manner in which K. set to work over Anna.

"I've been a very hard sister to her," she said. "If you can pull her through, I'll try to make up for it."

Christine sat on the stairs outside, frightened and helpless. They had sent for Sidney; but the little house had no telephone, and the message was slow in getting off.

At six o'clock Doctor Ed came panting up the stairs and into the room. K. stood back.

"Well, this is sad, Harriet," said Doctor Ed. "Why in the name of heaven, when I wasn't around, didn't you get another doctor. If she had had some amyl nitrate—"

"I gave her some nitrate of amyl," said K. quietly. "There was really no time to send for anybody. She almost went under at half-past five."

Max had kept his word, and even Doctor Ed did not suspect K.'s secret. He gave a quick glance at this tall young man who spoke so quietly of what he had done for the sick woman, and went on with his work.

Sidney arrived a little after six, and from that moment the confusion in the sickroom was at an end. She moved Christine from the stairs, where Katie on her numerous errands must crawl over her; set Harriet to warming her mother's bed and getting it ready; opened windows, brought order and quiet. And then, with death in her eyes, she took up her position beside her mother. This was no time for weeping; that would come later. Once she turned to K., standing watchfully beside her.

"I think you have known this for a long time," she said. And, when he did not answer: "Why did you let me stay away from her? It would have been such a little time!"

"We were trying to do our best for both of you," he replied.

Anna was unconscious and sinking fast. One thought obsessed Sidney. She repeated it over and over. It came as a cry from the depths of the girl's new experience.

"She has had so little of life," she said, over and over. "So little! Just this Street. She never knew anything else."

And finally K. took it up.

"After all, Sidney," he said, "the Street is life; the world is only many streets. She had a great deal. She had love and content, and she had you."

Anna died a little after midnight, a quiet passing, so that only Sidney and the two men knew when she went away. It was Harriet who collapsed. During all that long evening she had sat looking back over years of small unkindnesses. The thorn of Anna's inefficiency had always rankled in her flesh. She had been hard, uncompromising, thwarted. And now it was forever too late.

K. had watched Sidney carefully. Once he thought she was fainting, and went to her. But she shook her head.

"I am all right. Do you think you could get them all out of the room and let me have her alone for just a few minutes?"

He cleared the room and took his vigil outside the door. And, as he stood there, he thought of what he had said to Sidney about the Street. It was a world of its own. Here in this very house were death and separation; Harriet's starved life; Christine and Palmer beginning a long and doubtful future together; himself, a failure, and an impostor.

When he opened the door again, Sidney was standing by her mother's bed. He went to her, and she turned and put her head against his shoulder like a tired child.

"Take me away, K.," she said pitifully.

And, with his arm around her, he led her out of the room.

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Outside of her small immediate circle Anna's death was hardly felt. The little house went on much as before. Harriet carried back to her business a heaviness of spirit that made it difficult to bear with the small irritations of her day. On Sidney—and in less measure, of course, on K.—fell the real brunt of the disaster. Sidney kept up well until after the funeral, but went down the next day with a low fever.

"Overwork and grief," Doctor Ed said, and sternly forbade the hospital again until Christmas. Morning and evening K. stopped at her door and inquired for her, and morning and evening came Sidney's reply:

"Much better. I'll surely be up tomorrow."

But the days dragged on and she did not get about.

Downstairs, Christine and Palmer had entered on the round of midwinter gayeties. Palmer's "crowd" was a lively one. There were dinners and dances, week-end excursions to country houses. The Street grew accustomed to seeing automobiles stop before the little house at all hours of the night. Johnny Rosenfeld, driving Palmer's car, took to falling asleep at the wheel in broad daylight, and voiced his discontent to his mother.

"You never know where you are with them guys," he said briefly. "We start out for half an hour's run in the evening, and get home with the milk wagons. And the more some of them have had to drink, the more they want to drive the machine. If I get a chance, I'm going to beat it while the wind's my way."

But, talk as he might, in Johnny Rosenfelds' loyal heart there was no thought of desertion. Palmer had given him a man's job, and he would stick by it, no matter what came.

One such night Christine put in, lying wakefully in her bed, while the clock on the mantel tolled hour after hour into the night. Palmer did not come home at all. He sent a note from the office in the morning:

I hope you are not worried, darling. The car broke down near the Country club last night, and there was nothing to do but to spend the night there. I would have sent you word, but I did not want to rouse you. What do you say to the theater tonight and supper afterward?

Christine was learning. She telephoned the Country club that morning, and found that Palmer had not been there. But, although she knew now that he was deceiving her, as he always had deceived her, as probably he always would, she hesitated to confront him with what she knew. She shrank, as many a woman has shrunk before, from confronting him with his lie.

But the second time it happened she was roused. It was almost Christmas then, and Sidney was well on the way to recovery, thinner and very white, but going slowly up and down the staircase on K.'s arm, and sitting with Harriet and K. at the dinner table. She was begging to be back on duty for Christmas, and K. felt that he would have to give her up soon.

At three o'clock one morning Sidney roused from a light sleep to hear a rapping on her door.

"Is that you, Aunt Harriet?" she called.

"It's Christine. May I come in?"

Sidney unlocked her door. Christine slipped into the room. She carried a candle, and before she spoke she looked at Sidney's watch on the bedside table.

"I hoped my clock was wrong," she said. "I am sorry to waken you, Sidney, but I don't know what to do."

"Are you ill?"

"No. Palmer has not come home."

"What time is it?"

"After three o'clock."

Sidney had lighted the gas and was throwing on her dressing gowp.

"When he went out did he say—"

"He said nothing. We had been quarreling. Sidney, I am going home in the morning."

"You don't mean that, do you?"

"Don't I look as if I mean it? How much of this sort of thing is a woman suppose to endure?"

"Perhaps he has been delayed. These things always seem terrible in the middle of the night, but by morning—"

Christine whirled on her.

"This isn't the first time. You remember the letter I got on my wedding day?"

"Yes."

"He's gone back to her."

"Christine! Oh, I'm sure you're wrong. He's devoted to you. Oh, I don't believe it!"

"Believe it or not," said Christine doggedly, "that's exactly what has happened. I got something out of that little rat of a Rosenfeld boy, and the rest I know because I know Palmer. He's out with her tonight."

The hospital had taught Sidney one thing: that it took many people to make a world, and that out of these some were inevitably vicious. But vice had remained for her a clear abstraction. There were such people, and because one was in the world for service one cared for them. Even the Saviour had been kind to the woman of the streets.

But here abruptly Sidney found the great injustice of the world—that because of this vice the good suffer more than the wicked. Her young spirit rose in hot rebellion.

"It isn't fair!" she cried. "It makes me hate all the men in the world. Palmer cares for you, and yet he can do a thing like this!"

Christine was pacing nervously up and down the room. Mere companionship had soothed her. She was now, on the surface at least, less excited than Sidney.

"They are not all like Palmer, thank heaven," she said. "There are decent men. My father is one, and your K., here in the house, is another."

At four o'clock in the morning Palmer Howe came home. Christine met him in the lower hall. He was rather pale, but entirely sober. She confronted him in her straight white gown and waited for him to speak.

"I am sorry to be so late, Chris," he said. "The fact is, I am all in. I was driving the car out Seven Mile run. We blew out a tire and the thing turned over."

Christine noticed that his right arm was hanging inert by his side.

CHAPTER XIII.

Young Howe had been firmly resolved to give up all his bachelor habits with his wedding day. In his indolent, rather selfish way, he was much in love with his wife.

But with the inevitable misunderstandings of the first months of marriage had come a desire to be appreciated once again at his face value. Grace had taken him, not for what he was, but for what he seemed to be. With Christine the veil was rent. She knew him now—all his small indolences, his affectations, his weaknesses. Later on, like other women since the world began, she would learn to dissemble, to affect to believe him what he was not.

Grace had learned this lesson long ago. It was the A B C of her knowledge. And so, back to Grace came Palmer Howe, not with a suggestion to renew the old relationship, but for comradeship.

Christine sulked—he wanted good cheer; Christine was intolerant—he wanted tolerance; she disapproved of him and showed her disapproval—he wanted approval. He wanted life to be comfortable and cheerful, without recriminations, a little work and much play, a drink when one was thirsty. Distorted though it was, and founded on a wrong basis, perhaps, deep in his heart Palmer's only longing was for happiness; but this happiness must be of an active sort—not content, which is passive, but enjoyment.

"Come on out," he said. "I've got a car now. No taxi working its head off for us. Just a little run over the country roads, eh?"

It was the afternoon of the day before Christine's night visit to Sidney. The office had been closed, owing to a death, and Palmer was in possession of a holiday.

"Come on," he coaxed. "We'll go out to the Climbing Rose and have supper."

"I don't want to go."

"That's not true, Grace, and you know it."

"You and I are through."

"It's your doing, not mine. The roads are frozen hard; an hour's run into the country will bring your color back."

"Much you care about that. Go and ride with your wife," said the girl, and flung away from him.

The last few weeks had filled out her thin figure, but she still bore traces of her illness. Her short hair was curled over her head. She looked curiously boyish, almost sexless.

Because she saw him wince when she mentioned Christine, her ill temper increased. She showed her teeth.

"You get out of here," she said suddenly. "I didn't ask you to come back. I don't want you."

"Good heavens, Grace! You always knew I would have to marry some day."

"I was sick; I nearly died. I didn't hear any reports of you hanging around the hospital to learn how I was getting along."

He laughed rather sheepishly.

"I had to be careful. You know that as well as I do. I know half the staff there. Besides, one of—" He hesitated over his wife's name. "A girl I know very well was in the training school. There would have been the devil to pay if I'd as much as called up."

"You never told me you were going to get married."

Cornered, he slipped an arm around her. But she shook him off.

"I meant to tell you, honey; but you got sick. Anyhow, I—I hated to tell you, honey."

He had furnished the flat for her. There was a comfortable feeling of coming home about going there again. And, now that the worst minute of their meeting was over, he was visibly happier. But Grace continued to stand eyeing him somberly.

Do you think that Christine is justified, now that she has learned her husband's true nature, in going back to her folks and in securing a divorce?

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

A sewing machine has been invented to stitch together baseball covers.

Welded Glass.

Welded glass suitable for certain optical instruments and other apparatus is a novel material, that is stated to be of great practical value as well as much interest. As the welding process is described by Parker and Dalladay to the Faraday society of London, the glass surfaces to be joined are placed in good optical contact under pressure, and are heated to a carefully predetermined temperature, which, to avoid distortion of optically worked surfaces, must not approach too near what is defined as the "annealing point." This point of appreciable softening is determined for any kind of glass by noting the tempertaure at which the internal heat stresses seen in the glass with polarized light quite suddenly disappears. Similar glasses unite perfectly well below this point; but with very unlike kinds, the softer becomes distorted before the harder is hot enough to make a good weld.

Prescience.

"Don't call my baby a squalling brat. That child is going to be an artist."

"I'd like to know how you can tell that?"

"Because he takes to yelling whenever you begin to sing."

Naturally.

"We want a fellow of push as salesman in our buisenss."

"What is it?"

"Making baby carriages."

"Ah! then almost any married man would do."

Watch Acts and Speech.

Somebody is influenced by what you are, by what you say, and by what you do—so watch your acts and speech.

Possible.

"You haven't seen my engagement ring, have you?"

"I don't know. Who is the man?"